

**Amendments to the Claims:**

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

**Listing of Claims:**

Claim 1 (Original): A suturing apparatus, comprising:

a body;

a needle, the needle having a proximal end and a distal end, the proximal end of the needle attached to the body and having a first central axis portion located within the proximal end of the needle, the distal end of the needle having a needle tip capable of penetrating tissue, the needle tip having a tapered portion, the tapered portion having a center line comprising the centroids of adjacent selected planar cross-sections of the tapered portion, each selected planar cross-section selected for having the smallest area of all planar cross-sections having the same centroid as the selected planar cross-section, the distal end of the needle formed so that at least a first line is tangent to the center line, the first line forming an acute angle with the first central axis portion;

a moveable arm, the moveable arm having a proximal end and a distal end, the proximal end of the moveable arm movably attached to the body, the distal end of the moveable arm operable to contact at least a portion of the needle tip; and

a moveable arm actuator, the moveable arm actuator operable to move the movable arm between an open position and a closed position, the closed position occurring when the distal end of the moveable arm contacts at least a portion of the

needle tip, the open position occurring when the distal end of the moveable arm does not contact the needle tip.

Claim 2 (Original): A suturing apparatus as claimed in claim 1, wherein the needle has a "J" shape, with the proximal end of the needle comprising an elongated, straight portion of the "J".

Claim 3 (Original): A suturing apparatus as claimed in claim 1, wherein the distal end of the needle has at least one passage to hold suture material.

Claim 4 (Original): A suturing apparatus as claimed in claim 1, wherein the moveable arm is pivotably mounted within the body.

Claim 5 (Original): A suturing apparatus as claimed in claim 1, wherein the distal end of the moveable arm has a needle tip protector.

Claim 6 (Original): A suturing apparatus as claimed in claim 1, wherein the moveable arm actuator comprises a compression member, the compression member disposed within the body, the compression member operable to urge the movable arm to the open position.

Claim 7 (Original): A suturing apparatus as claimed in claim 6, wherein the compression member is a spring.

Claim 8 (Original): A suturing apparatus as claimed in claim 1, wherein the apparatus comprises materials capable of tolerating autoclave sterilization.

Claim 9 (Original): A suturing apparatus as claimed in claim 1, further comprising a first handle and a second handle, the first handle and the second handle attached to opposite sides of the body.

Claim 10 (Currently amended): A suturing apparatus as claimed in claim 1, further comprising a first depression and a second depression, the first depression and the second depression disposed upon opposite sides of the body in locations where they may accept an operator's fingers while the operator is placing sutures.

Claim 11 (Currently amended): A suturing apparatus as claimed in claim 1, further comprising a first depression and a second depression, the first depression and the second depression disposed upon the underside of the body in locations where they may accept an operator's fingers while the operator is placing sutures.

Claim 12 (Currently amended): A suturing apparatus as claimed in claim 1, wherein the apparatus is ~~configured~~ optimized for left-handed use.

Claim 13 (Original) A suturing apparatus, comprising:

a body;

a needle, the needle having a proximal end and a distal end, the proximal end of the needle attached to the body, the distal end of the needle curved to form a hook, the distal end of the needle having means for penetrating tissue, the distal end of the needle having means for holding suture material;

a moveable arm, the moveable arm having a proximal end and a distal end, the proximal end of the moveable arm pivotally mounted within the body, the distal end of the moveable arm having means to cover at least a portion of the needle tip; and

a moveable arm actuator, the moveable arm actuator operable to move the movable arm between an open position and a closed position, the closed position occurring when the distal end of the moveable arm covers at least a portion of the needle tip, the open position occurring when the distal end of the moveable arm does not contact the needle tip, the moveable arm actuator comprising a compression member, the compression member disposed within the body, the compression member operable to urge the movable arm to the open position.

Claim 14 (Original): A suturing apparatus as claimed in claim 13, wherein the apparatus comprises materials capable of tolerating autoclave sterilization.

Claim 15 (Currently amended): A suturing apparatus as claimed in claim 13, wherein the apparatus is ~~configured~~ optimized for left-handed use.

Claim 16 (Original): A suturing apparatus as claimed in claim 13, further comprising a first handle and a second handle, the first handle and the second handle attached to opposite sides of the body.

Claim 17 (Original): A suturing apparatus as claimed in claim 13, further comprising a first depression and a second depression, the first depression and the second depression disposed upon opposite sides of the body.

Claim 18 (Original): A suturing apparatus as claimed in claim 13, further comprising a first depression and a second depression, the first depression and the second depression disposed upon the underside of the body.

Claim 19 (Original): Means for suturing a surgical incision, comprising:

suturing means for passing suture material through tissue from within a surgical incision;

protection means for protecting the suturing means so as to avoid unintentional penetration of tissue by the suturing means; and

means for engaging the protection means with the suturing means.